



COMMON THREADS

Volunteer Handbook

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Contents.

Welcome!	2
1. Mission & Values	2
2. Volunteer Eligibility	3
3. Equal Opportunity & Non-Discrimination	3
4. Volunteer Conduct Expectations	3
5. Trauma-Informed Service Standards	4
6. Confidentiality Policy	4
7. Safety Policies	5
8. Health & Sanitation Procedures	6
9. Dress Code	6
10. Vehicle & Equipment Policies	6
11. Media & Social Media Policy	7
12. Harassment & Workplace Respect	7
13. Substance-Free Environment	7
14. Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection	7
15. Conflict Resolution	8
16. Dismissal of Volunteers	8
17. Volunteer Benefits & Support	8
18. Reporting Concerns	9
Volunteer Acknowledgment	10

COMMON THREADS COMMUNITY OUTREACH, INC.

Volunteer Handbook

Adopted: May 17, 2026

Welcome!

Thank you for volunteering with Common Threads mobile laundry! Volunteers are essential to our mission of serving individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity with dignity, compassion, and respect.

This handbook outlines the expectations, responsibilities, and policies that apply to all volunteers.

1. Mission & Values

Mission

To provide free mobile laundry services and compassionate outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in Rhode Island.

Core Values

Volunteers are expected to uphold:

- Respect and dignity
- Compassion
- Safety
- Inclusion
- Professionalism
- Accountability
- Confidentiality

2. Volunteer Eligibility

Volunteers must:

- Complete a volunteer application
- Attend orientation and required training
- Sign required agreements
- Meet minimum age requirements
- Pass background checks if required

Minimum Age Requirements:

- Ages 14–17 may volunteer with parental consent and supervision
- Volunteers under 18 may not operate equipment or vehicles
- Adult supervision is required for minors

3. Equal Opportunity & Non-Discrimination

We do not discriminate based on:

- Race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, or veteran status. All volunteers are expected to support an inclusive environment.

4. Volunteer Conduct Expectations

Volunteers must:

- Treat all clients respectfully
- Maintain professional boundaries
- Follow staff instructions
- Work cooperatively with others
- Use respectful language
- Arrive on time and prepared
- Follow safety protocols
- Represent Common Threads and partner organizations professionally

Volunteers may not:

- Harass or discriminate against anyone
- Use threatening or abusive behavior
- Exchange personal contact information with clients without approval
- Transport clients in personal vehicles unless authorized
- Accept gifts or money from clients
- Promote political or religious views aggressively during service activities

5. Trauma-Informed Service Standards

Many clients have experienced trauma, poverty, violence, or mental health challenges.

Volunteers should:

- Speak calmly and respectfully
- Avoid judgmental language
- Respect personal space
- Offer choices whenever possible
- Avoid pressuring clients
- Practice patience and empathy

Volunteers should not:

- Ask intrusive personal questions
- Attempt counseling unless qualified
- Make promises they cannot keep

6. Confidentiality Policy

Volunteers may learn sensitive information about clients.

Volunteers must:

- Keep all client information confidential
- Avoid discussing clients outside the organization
- Protect records and documents
- Follow privacy procedures

Confidential information includes:

- Names
- Health conditions
- Housing status
- Personal histories
- Photos or identifying details

Violation of confidentiality may result in dismissal.

7. Safety Policies

General Safety

Volunteers must:

- Follow all safety instructions
- Report hazards immediately
- Wear appropriate PPE when directed by Supervisor
- Use caution around machinery

Prohibited Activities

Volunteers may not:

- Operate equipment without training
- Handle biohazards unless authorized
- Perform unsafe tasks
- Work under the influence of drugs or alcohol

Emergency Situations

In emergencies:

- Notify Supervisor immediately
- Call 911 if directed
- Follow emergency procedures
- Complete incident reports if necessary

8. Health & Sanitation Procedures

To maintain sanitary conditions:

- Wash or sanitize hands regularly
- Wear provided gloves when touching any clothing
- Avoid contact with bodily fluids
- Notify supervisors of unsafe laundry items

Unsafe conditions include:

- Blood
- Human waste
- Needles

Hazardous materials should be referred to staff immediately.

9. Dress Code

Volunteers should wear:

- Clean, modest clothing
- Closed-toe shoes
- Weather-appropriate attire
- Common Threads attire for identification purposes as available

10. Vehicle & Equipment Policies

Only authorized personnel may:

- Drive organizational vehicles
- Operate washers/dryers
- Use generators (if applicable)
- Connect or disconnect utility systems

Volunteers must report equipment issues immediately to the Supervisor on site.

11. Media & Social Media Policy

Volunteers may not:

- Post identifiable client photos without consent
- Share confidential information online
- Represent themselves as official spokespersons

Client dignity and privacy must always be protected.

12. Harassment & Workplace Respect

Harassment of any kind is prohibited, including:

- Sexual harassment
- Bullying
- Threats
- Discrimination
- Retaliation

Complaints should be reported to the Supervisor or Designated Safety Officer immediately.

13. Substance-Free Environment

Volunteers may not:

- Use alcohol or drugs during service
- Volunteer while impaired
- Possess illegal substances at service sites

Violation may result in immediate dismissal.

14. Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection

Volunteers must:

- Maintain appropriate boundaries
- Avoid being alone with minors whenever possible
- Report suspected abuse according to law and policy

15. Conflict Resolution

Volunteers are encouraged to:

- Address concerns respectfully
- Seek Supervisor assistance when needed
- Avoid escalating conflicts

Disruptive behavior may result in reassignment or dismissal.

16. Dismissal of Volunteers

The organization reserves the right to dismiss volunteers for:

- Safety violations
- Harassment
- Theft
- Confidentiality breaches
- Repeated misconduct
- Substance use
- Failure to follow policies

17. Volunteer Benefits & Support

Volunteers may receive:

- Training opportunities
- Community service verification
- Recognition events
- Recommendation letters when appropriate

18. Reporting Concerns

Volunteers should report:

- Unsafe conditions
- Policy violations
- Client safety concerns
- Harassment
- Equipment issues
- Suspected abuse

All instances should be reported immediately or within 24 hours of incident to the Supervisor on site or a Designated Safety Officer. Reports may be made confidentially when possible.

For specific Policies and Procedures, see handbook inside trailer or ask a Supervisor.